

Understanding al Qaeda Networks

Marc Sageman

Evidence based terrorism research

- Use of overt data to test conventional wisdom about terrorism
- Violent Islamist revivalist social movement, held together by an idea
- The use of violence against foreign or non-Muslim governments or population to establish an Islamist state in a core Arab region

Evolution of the idea

- Answer to Islamic decadence: vision of a just Islamist state, emulating the companions of the prophet (**Salaf**)
- Decadence & unfairness due to a **crisis of values** (*Jahiliyya*) requires overthrow of apostate ‘Muslim’ ruler to return to Salafi values (Qutb)
- Three phases of the global Salafi jihad
 - The forgotten duty, against the **near enemy** (Faraj)
 - Global expansion of the defensive jihad (Azzam)
 - Making the global jihad offensive
 - Switching priority against the **far enemy**, which supports the “near enemy” (al-Zawahiri & bin Laden)
 - Goal: expel the West from the Middle East to allow Salafi Mujahedin to create a Salafi state

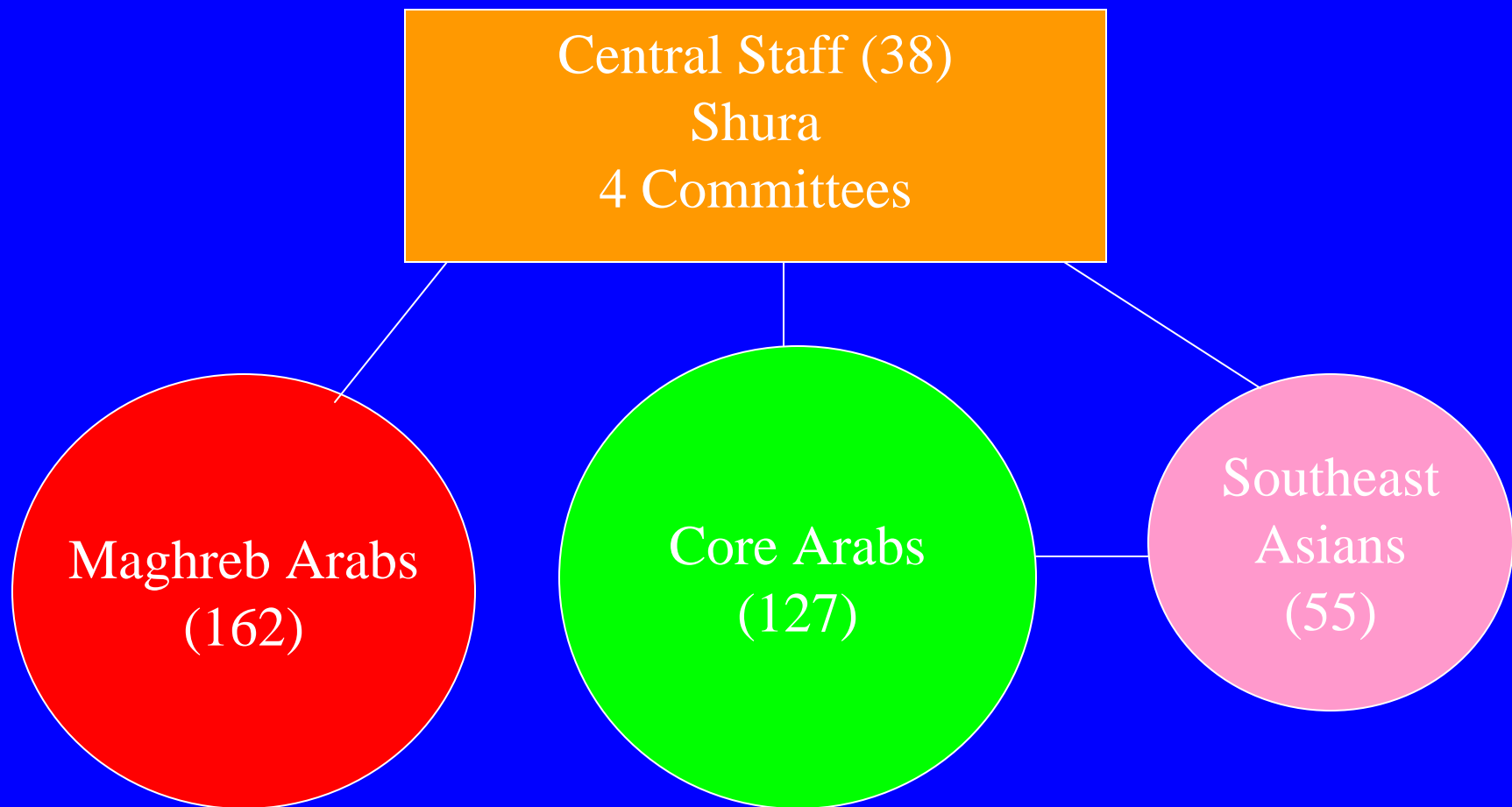
Global Salafi Jihad

- *Al Qaeda*
- Egyptian Islamic Jihad
- Egyptian Islamic Group (until 1995)
- *Jemaah Islamiyah*
- *Al Tawhid*
- Abu Sayyaf Group
- Moro Islamic Liberation Front
- Groupes Islamiques Armes
- Groupes Salafistes pour la Predication et le Combat
- *Salafia Jihadia*
- Groupes Islamiques Combattant Marocains
- Groupes Combattants Tunisiens

Data

- 400 biographies of terrorists
 - Transcripts of trials
 - US, France, Germany, Egypt, Indonesia, Morocco
 - Press accounts
 - English, French, German, Arabic, Turk, Spanish, Indonesian (FBIS)
 - Academic publications
 - Internet (corroborated)

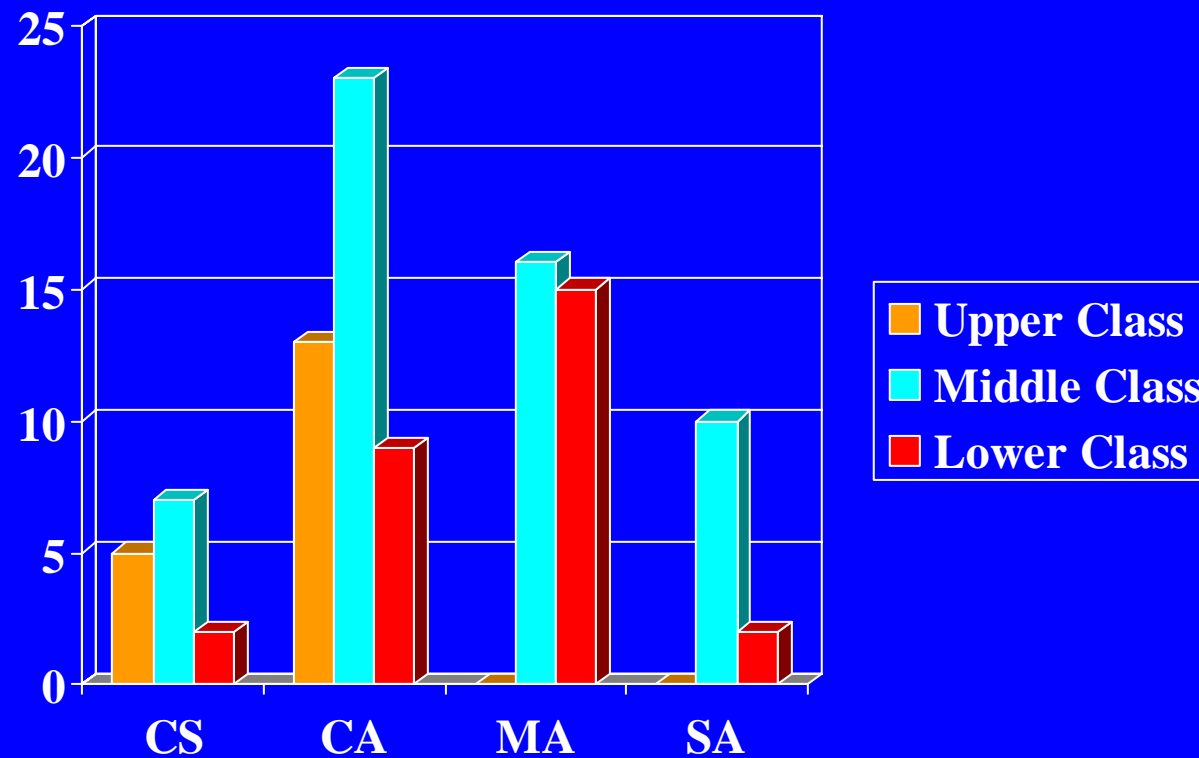
Global Salafi Network



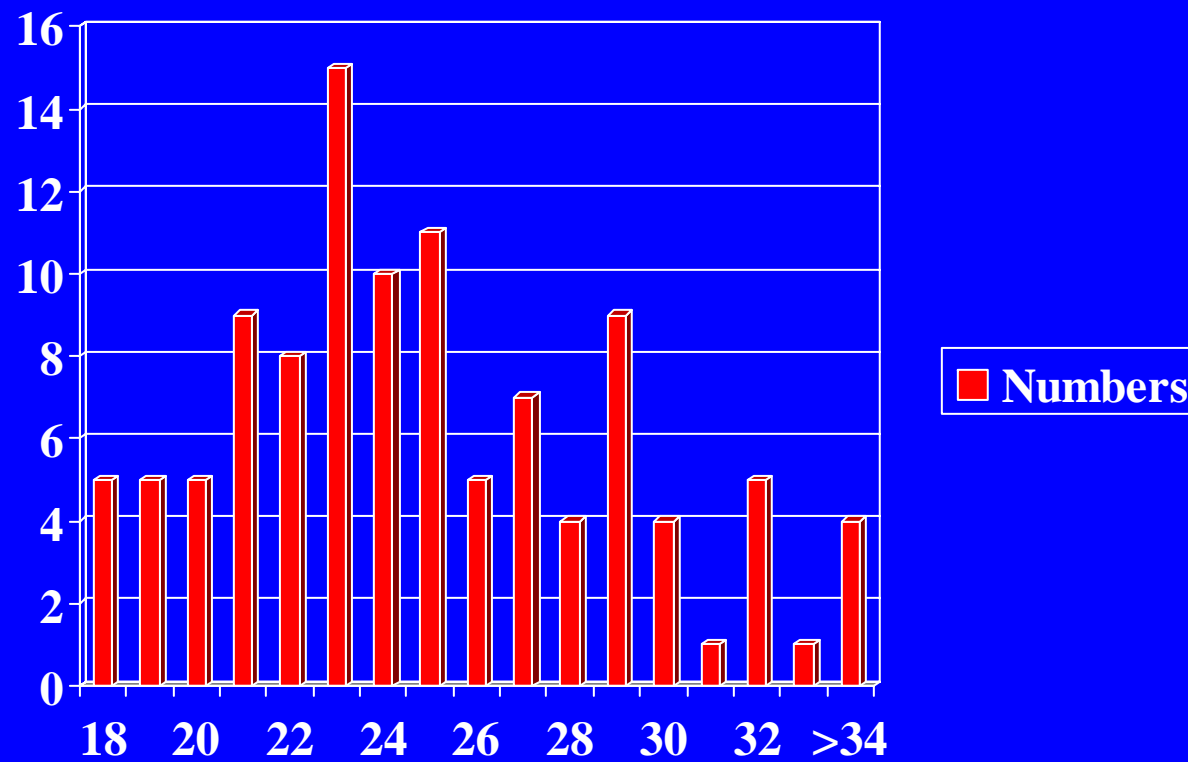
Theories of Terrorism

- Poverty
- Broken family
- Ignorance (lack of education)
- Immaturity
- No skills
- No family or job responsibility
- Weak minds (vulnerable to brainwashing: school, family or mosque)
- Mental illness
- Criminality
- Religious Fanaticism
- Evil

Family of Origin (SES)



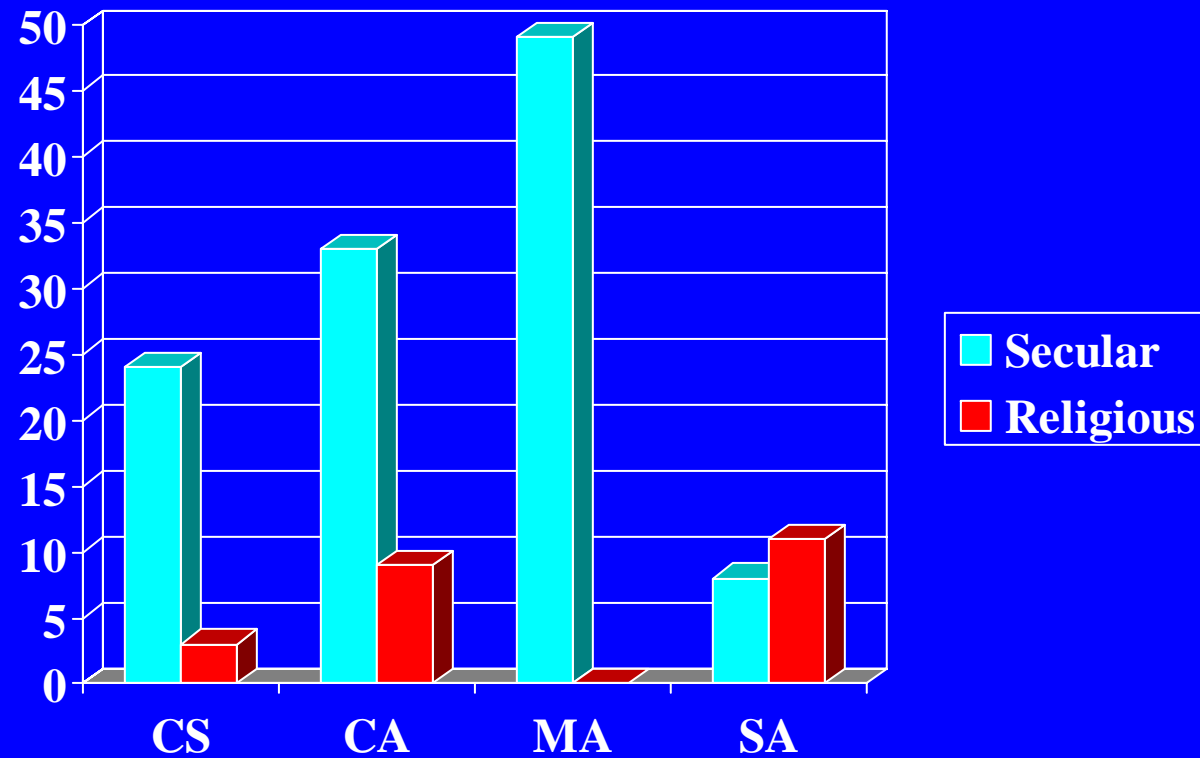
Recruitment: Age Distribution



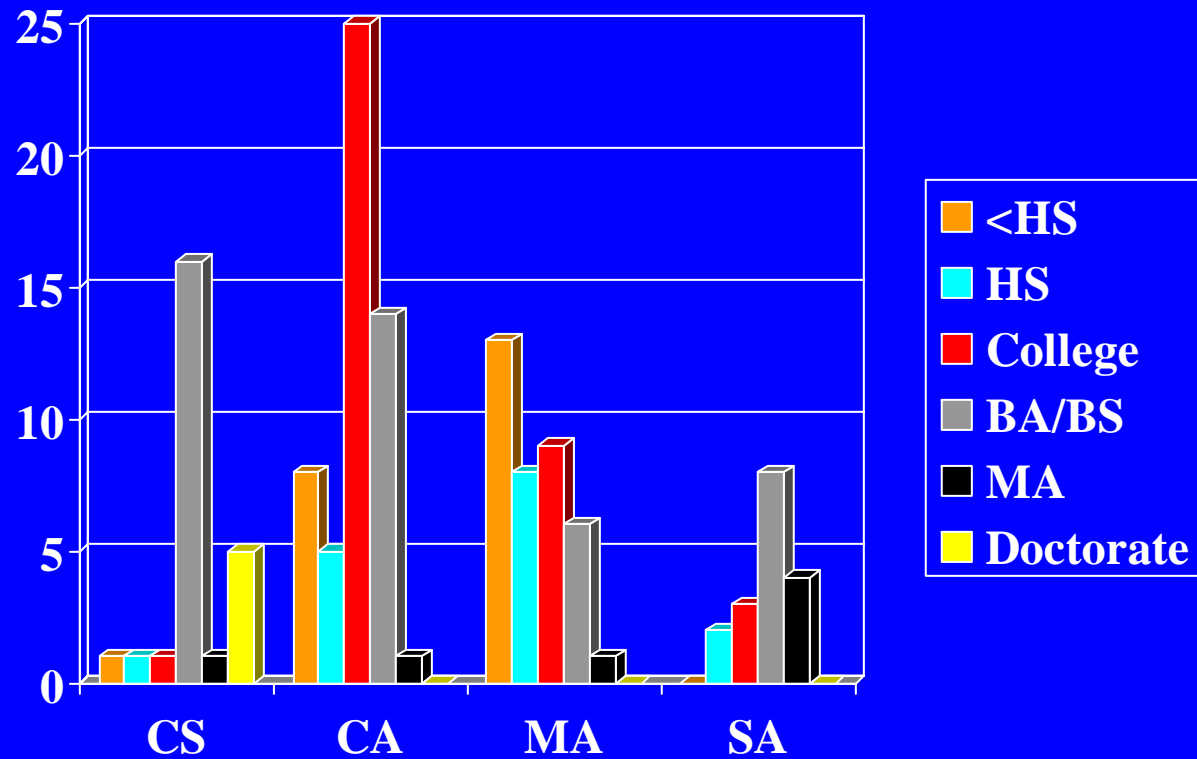
Age

- Average: 25.69 years
- Southeast Asians: 29.35 years
- Central Staff: 27.90 years
- Core Arabs: 23.75 years

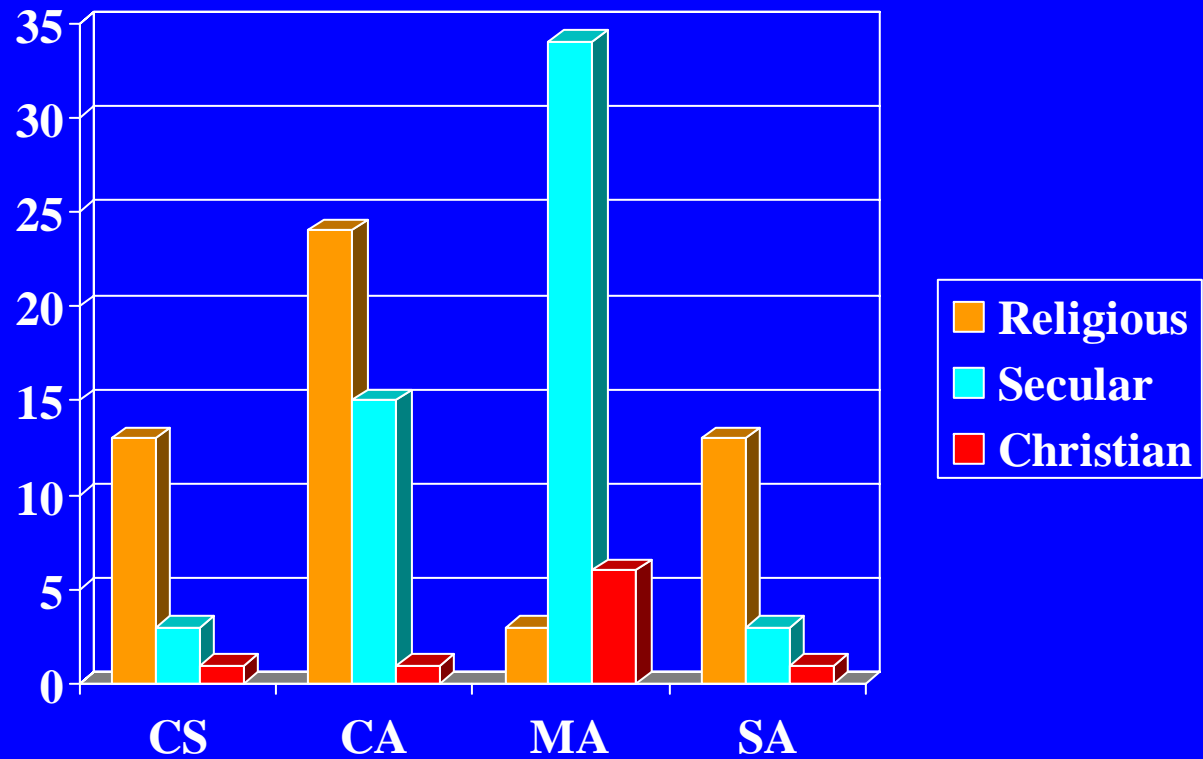
Type of Education



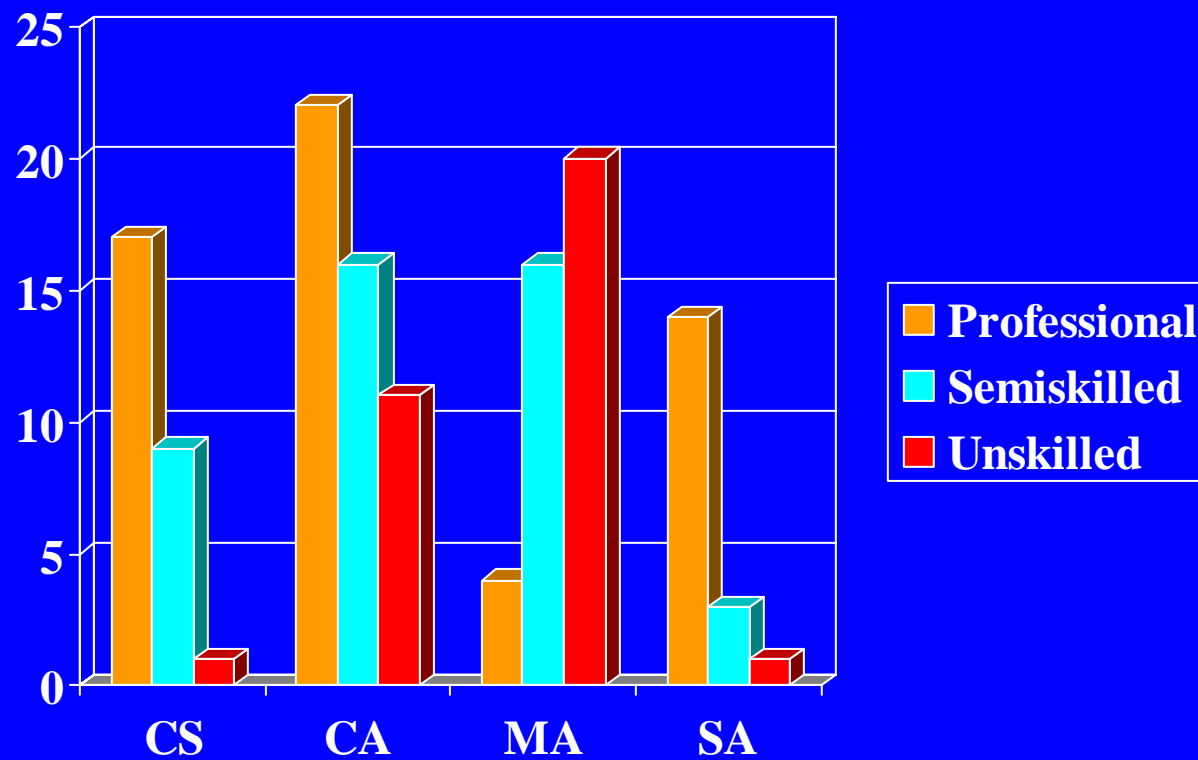
Levels of Education



Devotion as Youth



Occupation



Family Status

- 73% married
 - Most had children
 - All of Central Staff and Southeast Asian members were married
- Most unmarried were students or too young
- Consistent with Salafi Islam

Criminal Background

- Vast Majority: no crime
- Some major crime
 - Robbery (Roubaix gang, Kelkal gang, *Jl*)
- Petty crime: Maghreb logistic cells
 - Credit card fraud
 - False documents
 - Counterfeit & laundering money
 - Insurance fraud
 - Drug traffic
- Those least likely to do harm individually are most able to do so collectively.

Mental Health

- Only four cases of possible thought disorder
- One with mild mental retardation
- Very little trauma in family studied: less than 10% with parent who died while young
- Usually over-protected youth
- No “pathological narcissism” detected
- Overall, “good kids” with the exception of some second generation Maghreb Arabs, who lived a life of petty crime

Site of Joining the Jihad

- Foreign Country: 70%
- “Excluded” second generation (Maghreb Arabs in France and Spain): 10%
- The vast majority alienated from ambient society and cut off from cultural & social origins, far from family and friends of origin.

Joining the Jihad

- **Friendship** (pre-existing): 68%
 - “Bunch of guys”
 - Cliques of friends joining together
- **Kinship:** 20%
 - Sons, brothers, first cousins
 - Importance of in-laws & marriage to cement bonds between Mujahedin
- **Discipleship:** 10%
 - Southeast Asia: *Jemaah Islamiyah*
 - Pondok Ngruki: Abu Bakar Baasyir & Abdullah Sungkar
 - Pesantren Luqmanul Hakiem: Ali Ghufon

Profile (Central Staff & Southeast Asians)

- Central Staff:
 - Mostly Egyptian Islamic militants released from prison, who went to Afghanistan for the jihad against the Soviets
 - Afghanistan became the “scene” where they created al Qaeda
 - The ideology of al-Qaeda (fighting the West & the US) was a progressive development, not fully articulated until the 1996 fatwa
- Southeast Asians:
 - Mostly disciples of Baasyir & Sungkar

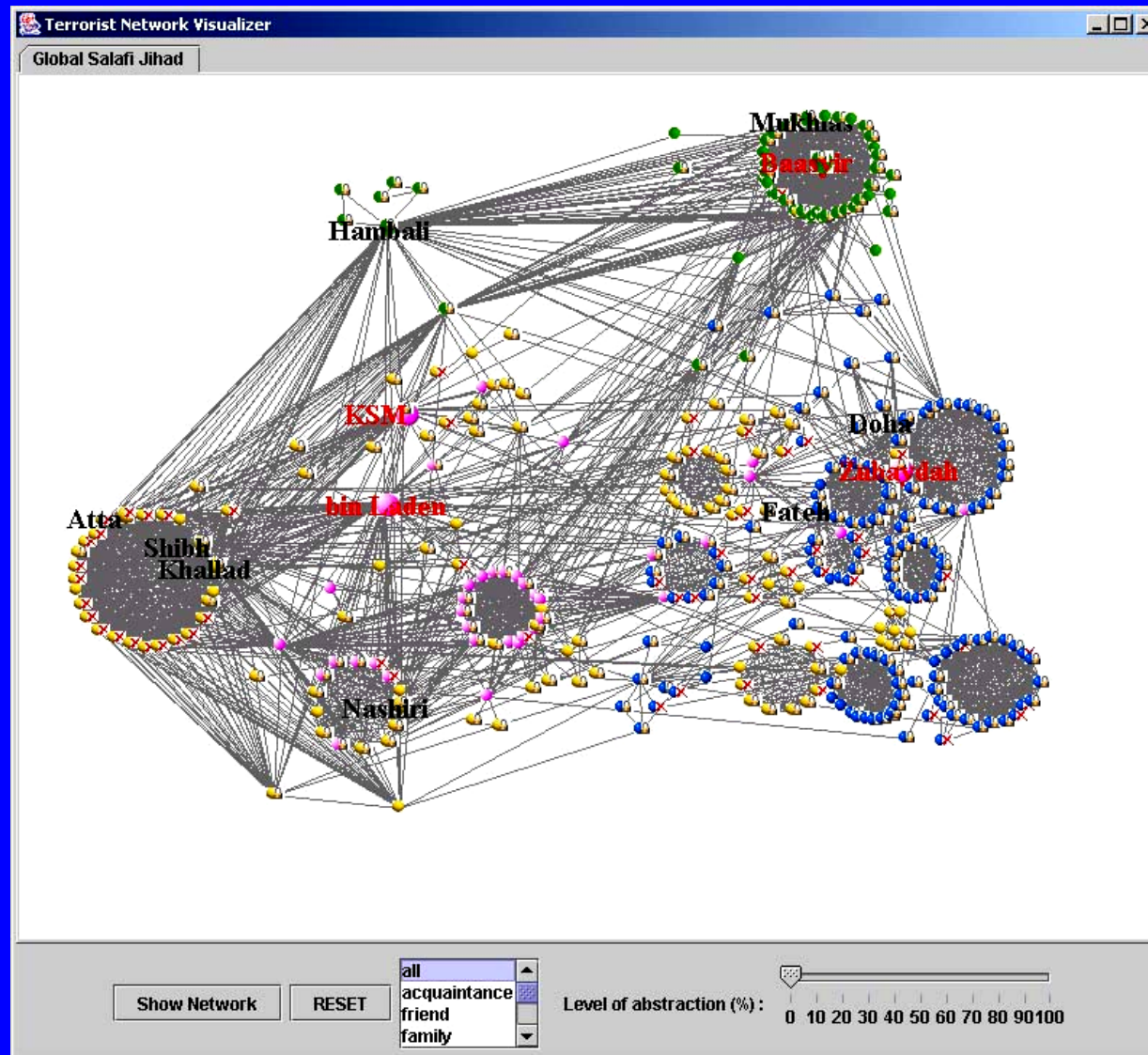
Profile (Core & Maghreb Arabs)

- Upwardly and geographically mobile
- Mostly from religious, caring & middle class families
- International people, conversant in 3 or 4 languages (global citizens)
- Skilled in computer technology
- Separated from traditional bonds & culture
- Homesick, lonely, marginalized → sought new friends
- Drifted to mosques for companionship, not religion
- Moved in together (halal food), formed cliques
- Cliques transformed alienated young Muslims into fanatic terrorists

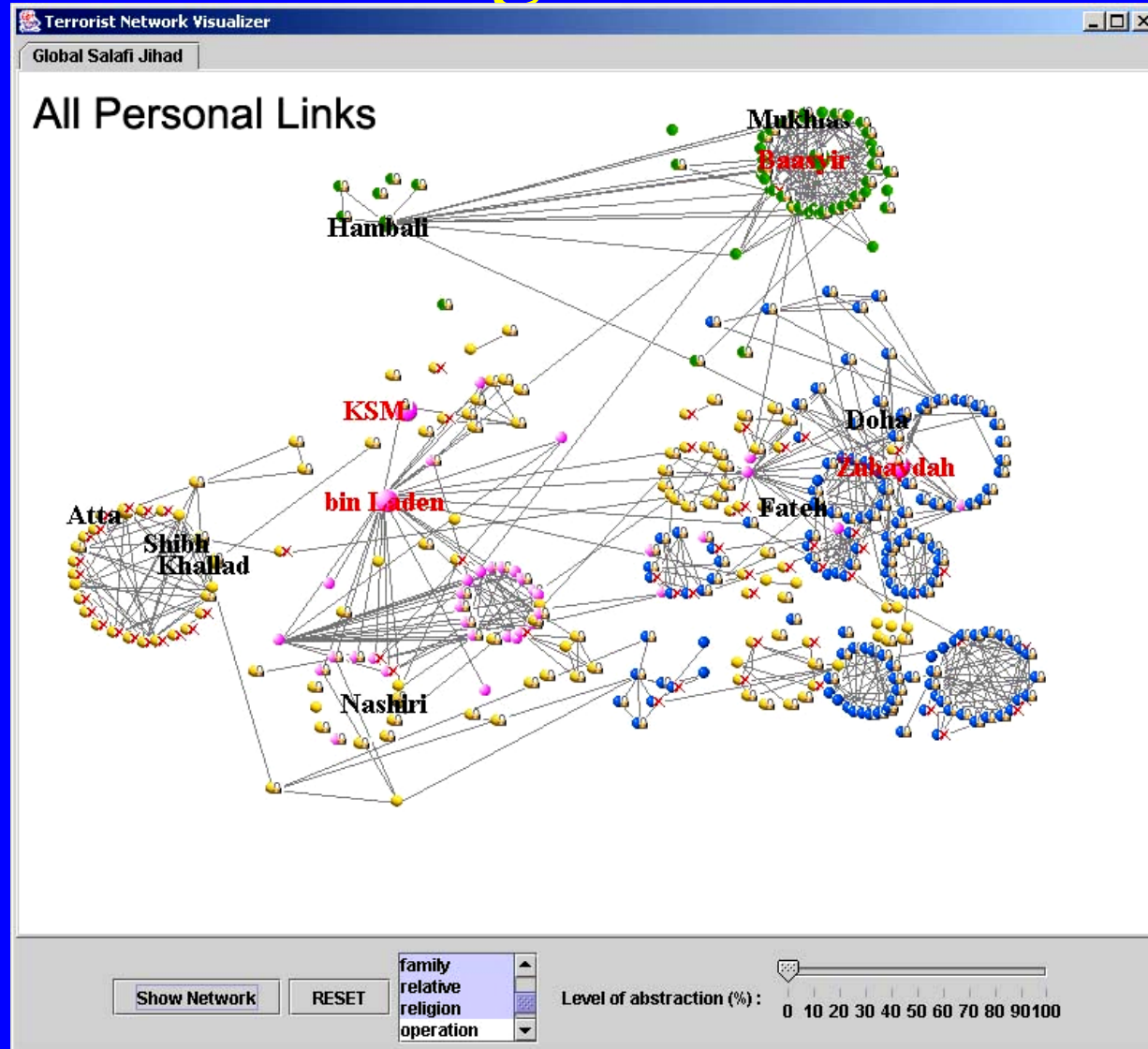
Joining the jihad

- Bottom up, self-organizing activity
- No top down recruitment program
 - No campaign, central committee or budget dedicated to recruitment
 - Selection: only 15-25% of volunteers accepted
 - Gaps in the worldwide distribution of the jihad: U.S.
- Social bonds came before ideological commitment
- No evidence of “brainwashing”: they simply acquired the beliefs of their friends
- Importance of specific mosques providing script for the global Salafi jihad: 10 mosques generated 50% of sample
- They joined the jihad through human bridges: acquaintances, relatives and imams

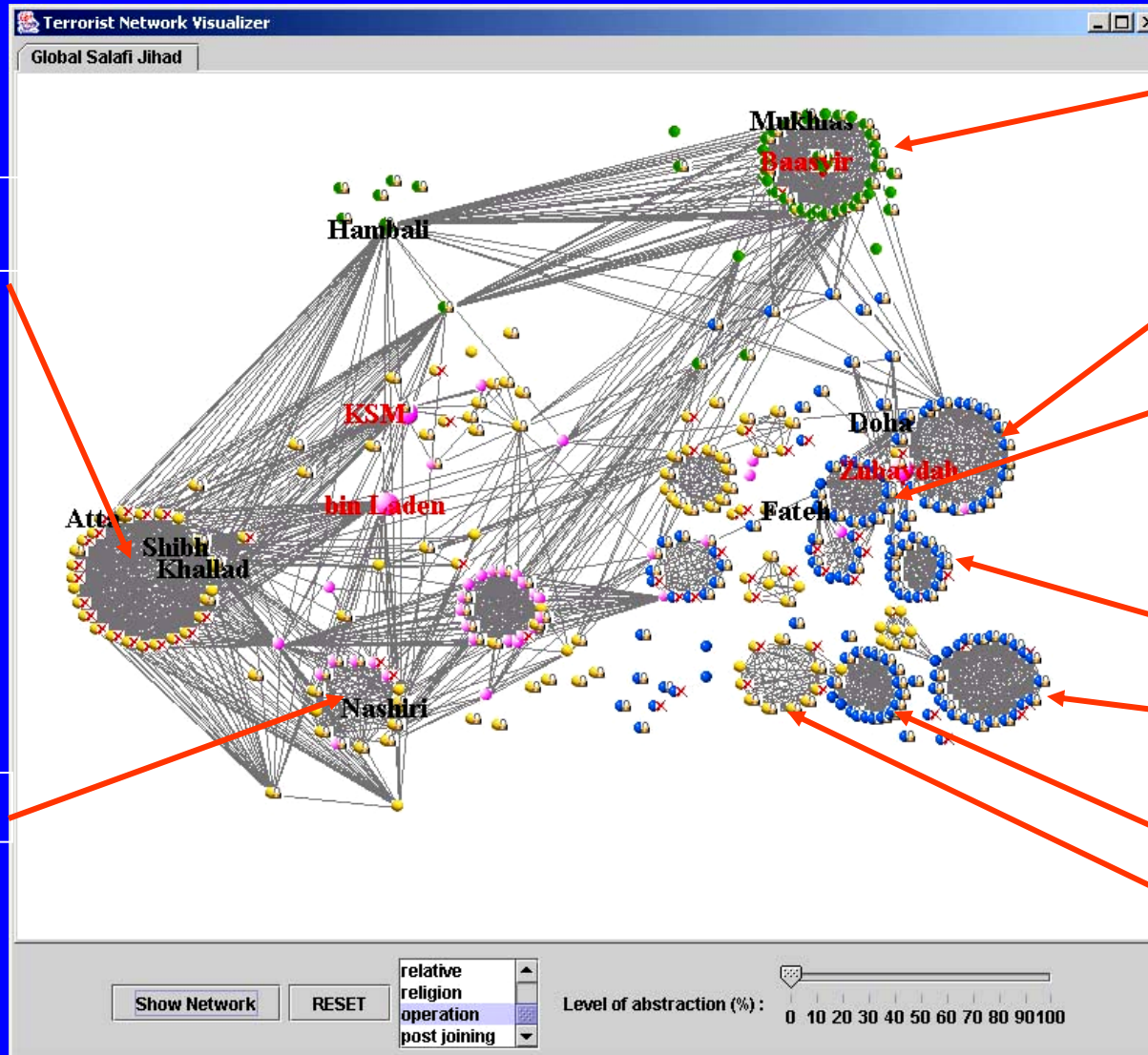
The Network



Pre-existing social bonds



Operational Links



9/11/01

Emb, 1998

Bali, 2002
Jakarta, 2003
Singapore Plot, 2001

Strasbourg, 1999

LAX, 1999

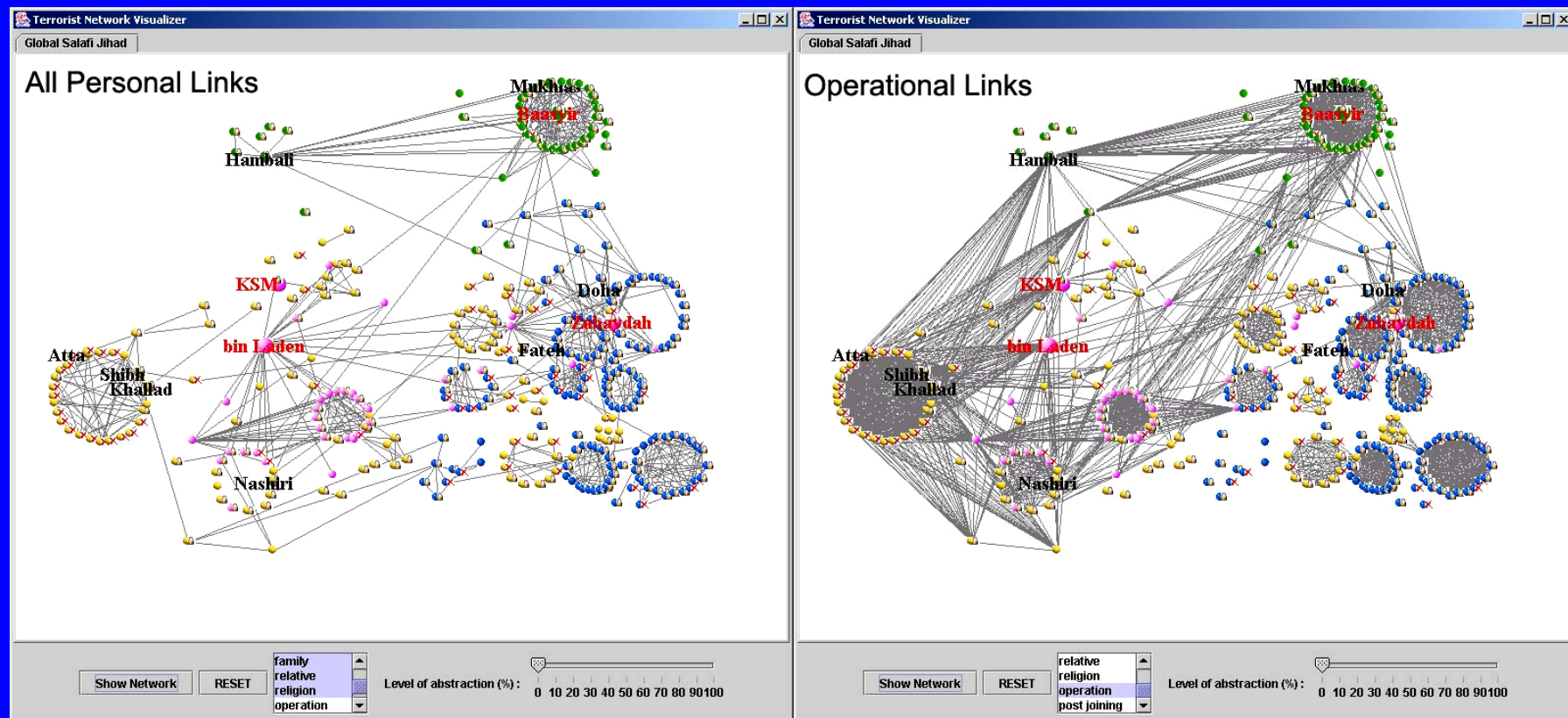
France, 1995

Casablanca, 2003

Morocco, 1994

Istanbul, 2003

Personal v Operational Links



Global Salafi Jihad

- Decentralized network, not hierarchical unit
 - Local initiative, flexible & robust
 - Informal communications (pre-existing social bonds) insuring success of operations
- Fuzzy boundaries, not well defined
 - No fixed number: fluctuates according to local grievances & world situation
 - 2/3 2001 leaders gone → more aggressive, reckless, new 2004 leaders
- No hard targets for military solutions
- Combating fuzzy idea-based networks requires idea-based solutions: War of Ideas